



Deer Park, NY—Faced with a predicted 25 percent increase in heating oil costs, over 35,000 Long Island households may struggle to keep their homes warm this winter. On Monday, U.S. Representatives Steve Israel and Tim Bishop joined the United Way of Long Island to launch the 13th season of Project Warmth, a program that supplements federal home heating assistance funding. Israel and Bishop also called on President Bush to reconsider his veto of a bill expanding the Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP), a program that helped over 35,000 Long Island households heat their homes last year.

“With oil prices skyrocketing, it’s unfathomable to me that President Bush would veto bipartisan legislation expanding the federal home heating assistance program to 1.5 million households,” said Congressman Israel, a member of the House Appropriations Committee. “The Administration continues to turn a deaf ear to the impact of home heating costs on American households, with an energy policy that can be summed up in two words: bundle up. Last year, over 35,000 Long Island households received support from the federal home heating assistance program, with many more getting help from Project Warmth. That’s why I’ll continue to fight to ensure that these programs have the resources they need to serve our community.”

“Heating oil prices are at record levels and the President’s veto will leave thousands of families in the cold this winter,” Bishop said. “I will continue to fight hard in Congress to override the President’s veto and get sufficient funding for LIHEAP. However, the lack of support from the government is going to place a heavier burden than ever on important programs like Project Warmth to help Long Islanders.”

“For many Long Islanders, choosing between putting food on the table and paying for heating bills has become an unfortunate reality,” said United Way President & CEO Christopher M. Hahn. “The families assisted through Project Warmth have encountered hard times for a variety of reasons—unemployment, serious illness, disability, divorce or the loss of a spouse. Although financially stressed, some of these families are not eligible for government assistance, and for those who are, the assistance is often not enough in times of rising fuel costs.”

Israel and Bishop were joined by Victor A. Pons, a retired engineer from West Islip who has been struggling to pay his fuel bills. Mr. Pons lives on a fixed income from Social Security and

expects to spend \$2,500 heating his home this winter. Last year, when his fuel bills totaled \$2,100, he received \$1,000 in assistance through the federal LIHEAP program.

LIHEAP block grants are allocated to the states by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to assist low-income households—particularly those with the lowest incomes that pay a high proportion of household income for home energy—primarily in meeting their immediate home energy needs. Last year LIHEAP was funded at \$2.161 billion. The President has proposed cutting \$379 million from the program despite record energy prices. The bill passed by both houses of Congress would have increased aid to LIHEAP by \$249 million to keep up with rising costs. The funding passed by Congress would allow the program to serve approximately 1.5 million more families than the President's budget.

Last year, Project Warmth helped 1,603 families with heating assistance. This included 2,434 children and 2,659 adults, many of them seniors. The program has assisted 17,000 families since 1995 with a total of \$4.78 million in grants.

Each year, Project Warmth partners with community-based agencies that assist families in applying for emergency heating grants. These agencies also help the families connect with other local resources that can lead to permanent solutions to their financial difficulties, including budget/debt counseling, supplemental food programs or job training services. With these services, less than a quarter of the Project Warmth families need heating assistance the following year.

With the help of Project Warmth partners—National Grid/KeySpan, KeySpan Foundation, LIPA and the Long Island Radio Group—Long Islanders can offer support to their neighbors needing help this winter. KeySpan and LIPA have included yellow Project Warmth contribution envelopes in their bills this winter for Project Warmth contributions. Last year, nearly 5,000 Long Islanders used the solicitation envelop to contribute to the fund. Long Island Radio Group (WHLI 1100AM, KJOY 98.3, B103, Island 94.3, WRCN 103.9 and Love 96) will be running public service announcements throughout the winter.

Contributions to Project Warmth may also be made online at www.unitedwayli.org or by sending a check to Project Warmth c/o United Way of Long Island, 819 Grand Boulevard, Deer Park, NY 11729. One hundred percent of the gift will be used to support those in need.